

# PEOPLE & THINGS

By ATTICUS

THE chairmanship of the new TV Authority will be one of the most momentous public appointments of our time. Not, indeed, since 1922, when Mr. John Reith was made general manager of the B.B.C., has an appointment in this sphere been so fraught with possibilities; and sound radio, in those primitive times, had none of the power, the flexibility and the hypnotic influence of the television screen.

The appointment is one in which the Prime Minister is rumoured to be taking an intense and particular interest; and it would not surprise me if his choice will soon be seen to have fallen, not upon any of those whose immediate experience might seem to equip them for the position, but upon someone for whose personal qualities Sir Winston has a sure and seasoned regard.

## Interpretrix

I HEAR that next week's delegation of British Labour M.P.s is to have, as its interpreter in China, the first Chinese lady to become a British peeress: Lady Lindsay of Birker.

Lady Lindsay (who prefers to be addressed as Mrs. Lindsay, and considers that "The title really has nothing to do with me") is the daughter of a Chinese army officer, Colonel Li Wen-chi. She first met her husband in Peking in 1941, when he was Tutor in Economics at the Yenching University and she was an undergraduate. Lord Lindsay, an enthusiastic Sinophile, has no ideological prejudices; though he was educated at Balliol (where his father was, of course, Master from 1924 to 1949) his own career has been made mostly in America and Australia, and he is now senior research fellow at the Canberra School of Pacific Studies.

It may, or may not, have some bearing on Lady Lindsay's duties next week that her maiden name, if translated literally, means "Persuasive Dawn."

## Metamorphoses

"THE TURN OF THE SCREW" is not my favourite among Henry James's novels, but there is about the character of Peter Quint a thorough-minded wickedness that commands my admiration. With his close-curling red hair, his "white face of damnation," and his eyes that were "sharp, strange—awfully," he is in the grand line of Victorian villains.

In most stage-adaptations Peter Quint is merely a forbidding shadow. I hear, however, from Mr. Benjamin Britten that in the new operatic version which is to be presented in Venice this September, he and his librettist, Mrs. John Piper, have bodied forth Peter Quint and made him one of the principal participants. More:

they have given the role to Mr. Peter Pears.

Now, among living singers, Mr. Pears is one of the most consummate artists. His most obvious characteristic, however, is a radiant good nature. He is the Bayard of the concert platform, the White Knight of the operatic stage. That he should take upon himself the iniquities of Quint seems to me a metamorphosis to which Ovid alone could do justice.

## Frogman, 1847

THERE is a hierarchy among recreations. The brass-rubber and the diabolo - expert, for instance, no longer enjoy that prestige which once was theirs. The real-tennis player has been beaten back into his ducal sanctuary and the amateur astronomer is no longer (as he was in Hardy's



"Two on a Tower") the Heavendaring Faustus of his day.

It is the under-water explorer who now makes all the running. The comic masterpiece of 1955 will be renamed "Three Men Under A Boat"; and as we put on our fins, our goggles, and our oxygen-bags we flatter ourselves upon the modernity of this elaborate equipment.

We are wrong, however. For here, in a publication dated 1847 and entitled "The Festival of the Seasons," is a modish frogman, complete with helmet of tinplate, leather breeches, weights to ensure rapid descent, and octopus-axe at the ready. The anonymous features make it impossible, alas, for me to identify this Victorian Cousteau.

## Noddy & Co.

MISS ENID BLYTON is the most prolific, as well as the most popular, of living writers for children. When I first heard, therefore, that she was turning her hand to the theatre, I fancied that Lope de Vega, with his 723 known titles, might soon rank only as the world's second most voluminous playwright.

Miss Blyton's first play, a musical one, will be seen in London this Christmas. She tells me that the satisfied purchasers (nearly nine million in number to date) of her famous Noddy series are clamouring for what they will get: Noddy in the flesh—and not Noddy only, but Mary Mouse, Big-Ears, Mr. Pink Whistle and all Miss Blyton's other stalwarts.

Children are sticklers for traditional detail when their favourite books are transferred to

the stage; but with the Noddy Studio, the Noddy Licensing Co. and the author herself on the alert for any divergence, I feel that there is little risk of a howler. Such, moreover, is the loyalty of English audiences that I shall not be surprised if her play, which as yet is unnamed, comes to take its place beside "Peter Pan" and "Where the Rainbow Ends" among our ineradicable favourites. One title, not 723, may do the trick.

## Hard Cheese

FINE cheese, like fine wine, is personal to the individual producer. Stilton, Wensleydale, Cheshire, Caerphilly and Scottish Dunlop are back with us, but they are back as generalised conceits, rather than as the individual creations which were so prized by pre-war connoisseurs.

During a recent visit to Wensleydale I found that several weeks have still to run before the standards laid down by the Ministry of Food graders can be finally cast aside; and that it is this lingering tyranny, with its terror of idiosyncrasy and its insistence on a uniform standard of cheese-type substance, that is responsible for the impersonal flavour of so much that is sold under the great names.

I hope that this autumn will see the return—from Wensleydale, for instance—of those looser, mould-welcoming cheeses which were once so prized an adjunct of English cuisine; and that even the much-misrepresented Cheddar will bear the mark of individual impulse.

## A Question of Time

WORLD records in athletics have long passed into the realm of higher mathematics. The friendly official with the stopwatch is no longer the sole arbiter. Newsreel cameraman, psychiatrist, international lawyer, bio-chemist, tax-inspector and security officer—all have their say before the new figure is securely recorded.

I now hear of yet another complication. It has been calculated by the officials of the National Physical Laboratory that the variable force of gravity has a small but incontrovertible effect upon athletic performances. A putt made at Helsinki, for instance, would register slightly better than an identical putt made at Melbourne.

Weight-lifting, high-jumping and hurdling are other events which would be affected, however minutely, in the same way. The prospect is one which makes the carefree exploits of Lord Burghley seem as distant as those of the Scarlet Pimpernel himself.

## Perambulator

THE Englishman who goes to France to write is as common in fact as in fiction. Not so the Frenchman who returns the compliment: so that I was the more curious to recognise, in a fold of the Sussex Downs, the square swart figure of Monsieur Alain Gheerbrant.

More familiar with the Congo than the Ouse, this distinguished explorer-editor proposes, he tells me, to write his next book in though not on, this country. His affection could not be said to embrace our standard English cuisine since he had been marinading a leg of lamb for the previous thirty-six hours; but in all other manifestations of English folklore he displayed a high degree of courteous interest. Even musical comedy on ice had delighted him; the Congo he assured me, can show nothing more remarkable than the Emperor Franz Josef proceeding, maestoso on skates.